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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT Monday, September 25, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CAMPS FOR MIGRANT FAMILIES." Information from the Farm Security Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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In a recent chat I gave you a brief account of the migratory agricultural workers and their plight in a number of states. You may remember that some of these migrant families come from the dust bowl, some have been "tractored off" tenant farms, and others have always "followed the crops."

These people present serious economic, health, and social problems. Their earnings are low and precarious. They are undernourished, and so are a ready prey to sickness of every sort. The menance to health affects not only the migrants themselves, but the communities they stay in. They can spread many communicable diseases. They live under conditions that can hardly be imagined.

Let me give you some idea of what these conditions are. Then I'll tell you what the Farm Security Administration of the U. S. Department of Agriculture is doing to better these conditions.

Field investigators report that in some areas of Florida, the typical housing for migrant pickers is a shelter of about 14 rooms. Each room contains a family numbering from 1 to 10 persons. In one case, each room rented for $1.50 a week. During the season the landlord received $819. The cost of building this shelter was $400.

In Arizona, in the cotton-picking season, one group of migrants lived in deserted chicken sheds and a barn. Eight or 10 families lived in the barn with rough rag partitions for privacy and slept on the bare dirt floor. In North Carolina and many parts of the south the practice is to congregate the migrants in barns and tobacco sheds.

In the cranberry bogs of New Jersey, the workers often live in crude barracks housing ten to thirty families. Usually there are absolutely no comforts or conveniences, no bathing or laundry facilities. In the onion fields of one Michigan locality families were noted living in sheds which had been put up originally to house ducks.

During the harvest season in Texas, some communities become open camps with a huge fluctuating migrant population deprived of facilities for washing, bathing, or cooking. Typical ditch bank camp dwellings in the Imperial Valley of California are constructed of old tents, gunny sacks, dry-goods boxes, scrap tin. Most of the shacks are without floors, very dirty and swarming with flies. There are seldom any sanitary facilities. The irrigation ditch half filled with muddy water frequently is used for all purposes.

The Farm Security investigators found that the children in these families were especially susceptible to disease because they were so undernourished. They seldom stayed in one place long enough to attend school, nor did they have decent clothes to wear among other children. In truck crop, cotton and berry areas, the children have to work to bring the total family earnings above the starvation line.

In 1937, the Farm Security Administration started building camps for migrant farm labor of the family type. There are now operative or under construction 26 stationary camps and 6 mobile camps located in 7 states. These provide camp facilities for about 7,880 families at any one time, or about 30,000 families annually. When this figure is compared with the 350,000 migrant families throughout the country it is evident that additional camps are needed, either privately established or sponsored by the government.

Twelve of the stationary camps are in California, also 5 mobile camps. The mobile camps can be dismantled when one crop is over and moved to the next

location where workers will be needed in large numbers. Arizona, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Texas and Florida are other states that now have government camps.

The F.S.A. camps are usually laid out in a six sided figure, with rows of one-room steel shelters or of tent platforms on either side of a single roadway which outlines the shape of the camp. There may be two border roadways in a large camp. Every shelter or tent platform opens on a roadway. Water is piped to convenient locations, and garbage receptacles are available for every 6 to 10 shelters. The roadways are paved and lighted.

In the center of the camp there's a utility building with hot and cold water, shower baths, and laundry and ironing rooms. After wandering over the countryside and camping by the roadside, the comfort and convenience represented by this utility house are impossible to describe.

There is also a community center for residents to meet in, and indoor recreational facilities. Then there's an isolation unit for contagious diseases, a first aid room, a child clinic and nursery, and offices and living quarters for the camp manager. The men like the garage and workshop where they make repairs to their cars and furnishings. Some of the camps have small farm plots nearby operated for the benefit of the camp residents. The campers select their own committee as a governing body and abide by its decisions when disuptes arise. The committee asks campers who can do so to pay ten cents a day into a camp fund which provides recreational and other supplies, sometimes stoves and other furnishings for rent. In some cases two hours' work per week takes the place of the daily ten cent assessment.

Campers make friends among themselves and re-establish the feeling of belonging to a particular community. Some camps have classes for both children and adults. Adjacent to all but two of the camps small permanent houses have been constructed which rent for $8.20 a month to families reasonably sure of year-around employment in the area. Each house has an acre or so of land for growing foodstuffs. All in all, the camps set up an ideal to be striven for by the more enlightened communities using migrant labor. The migrants themselves are eager to find vacancies, since there are not yet enough camps to take care of all who would like to stay in them.